

# Inspection proves Brooklyn Bridge safe and sound



it's a great old bridge," he hastened to assert.

"Yes?"

"Yes. Phsaw, none of them other bridges can compare with it even yet."

"Can it be possible?"

## The Same Steel Pieces

"Sure. See them big steel cross pieces underneath? Them things that support the rails, you know? Well, them has been there ever since the bridge was put up and they're as good as ever. No, I'm not kiddin'. You take them same pieces on the Manhattan Bridge, now, and they're three or four times as heavy and not a bit better."

"Really?"

"Sure. Say, I been workin' on bridges all my life and if I don't know a bridge no one does. It's a great old bridge, I'll tell the world."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," said the graybeard. He shook hands solemnly with the mechanic. "Too bad you weren't born in Brooklyn," he called back as he moved away.

"Another of them Brooklyn Bridge nuts," remarked the ironworker as he started back for his abode. "But she's a good old bridge at that."

She is, Grover Whalen, who ought to know, seeing he is the Commissioner of Plant and Structures and therefore responsible for the condition of the structure, insists most enthusiastically that she is, swearing that just as soon as that new floor is down, and a few of the bolts—pins—are tightened up or replaced, she'll be as good as new.

## No Danger of Falling

From time to time disturbing rumors have been heard that the ancient link was about to fall down, or was sagging dangerously in spots, but each time the experts were called upon to make an examination they found, as much to their own astonishment as that of any one else, that the figure of speech was literally true.

Brooklyn Bridge not only is performing all the service originally set out for it, but is easily and safely carrying a traffic several times greater than dreamed of by its wildest protagonist.

And assuredly it isn't losing its hold on the affections of the people in the provinces.

The other day—it was the hour when the 9 a. m. office employees were jamming Nassau Street in their rush to get to their places of employment on time—rushing thousands in the downtown district were halted by a couple of dusky honeymooners who were too absorbed in their happiness to notice the ravages they were inflicting upon the traffic. They were dorkies of pronounced Southern type and apparently in fairly prosperous circumstances, for each was adorned by the habiliments which to those of their kind bespeak the height of fashion, good taste and brilliant color.

The bridegroom, who was huge and fairly beaming with newly won marital happiness, had on a sky-blue suit with slanting pockets vividly set off by glistening tan shoes and a blazing red necktie.

## Clear From Alabama

The bride glanced up at him from time to time, love and adoration in her eyes.

"Yessah," admitted the giant to a pedestrian whose heart was stirred by so much happiness and engaged him in conversation. "All the way fum ol' Alabama."

"Out a little early for sightseeing, aren't you?" pressed the pedestrian.

"Yessah, boss," granted the giant. "Yessah, but me 'nd mah wife—this yeh is mah wife—is aimin' to spend the day on Brooklyn Bridge. Kin you all please direct me 'nd mah wife as to the wheabouts of this yeh Brooklyn Bridge?"

The pedestrian could and did, although it meant making him a few minutes late at the office.

A great bridge with a great history. There may be some who come to the city and fail to visit Coney Island. Some may even neglect to climb the dimly lit stairs to the crown of the Statue of Liberty, and doubtless a few fail to attend a performance at the Hippodrome.

But who is there who comes from afar and neglects to make at least one pilgrimage to Brooklyn Bridge?

Seen on a misty day, what fairer

## By Arnold Prince

FEW days ago a youthful Westerner—well, he isn't exactly youthful, but in some mysterious fashion he manages not to grow up—burst into the office and gasped:

"They're taking Brooklyn Bridge apart!" He sat in a chair to collect himself. "Brooklyn Bridge!" he emphasized. "After forty-five years!"

In spite of the fact that he was addressing a group of Manhattanese who had grown somewhat callous to Brooklyn Bridge, condescendingly looking upon it as something too closely identified with the borough of alarm clocks and rubber plants, he caused something of a sensation.

"Actually?" inquired the stout member of the office, who thinks kindly of the Westerner and therefore takes him seriously sometimes. "Taking the bridge apart?"

## Enthusiasm Wouldn't Down

"Well, not exactly taking it apart," admitted the Westerner, a tiny wave of depression resulting from the concession to conservatism, "but they're taking out some of the bolts." His enthusiasm surged back at the thought of the bolts. "Been there forty years," he exclaimed jubilantly. "Think"—in an awed voice—"how many persons have passed over the old bridge in that time!"

One who is a native of the big city and does not know in what veneration Brooklyn Bridge is held by all outsiders—and, truth to tell, by most natives—might find difficulty in appreciating the Westerner's agitation. But in any case, at least two of his statements require clearing up.

In the first place, it is not forty-five years since the bridge was finished, but only thirty-seven. The span was turned over to the public on May 24, 1883, and so the four decades will not be up until May 24, 1923. A tablet states, however, that it was dedicated in October, 1876.

## Paint to Cost \$85,000

Nor, as intimated, is it true that the bridge is being taken apart. It is a fact that extensive alterations and repairs are being made, among the first improvements decided upon being a reinforced floor along the entire length of the span and a new coat of paint. The painting alone will cost \$85,000.

Here and there, too, sections of the steel work are being strengthened, and the old bolts—they are actually pins—are being replaced by new ones.

The Westerner was greatly wrought up when he discovered the metal pieces being plucked from the venerable structure—sort of severing the threads, you know, from among the old—but let no one jump to the conclusion that his is an isolated case.

A walk across the span any day when the workers are at their tasks will show this is not the fact.

Many stop to watch the riveters at work. In New York City rubber-necking is one of the recognized and established diversions, but there is something different about these gazers. They see in these overalled figures not mere mechanics engaged in unscrewing nuts, repainting iron work and replacing boards, but votaries of a holy task performing sacred rites on an edifice grown hallowed through the generations.

## "I Was There"

The other day a graybeard paused in his walk and beckoned to one of the workers. The worker was in a group of others on a cord at the far side of the elevated rails, and it meant considerable trouble for him to cross over the narrow footpath to the middle roadway for pedestrians, but he did it. Thus do the mellowing influences of sentiment and tradition exert themselves!

"See you are making repairs," offered the graybeard.

"Representing some iron company?" inquired the workman, eyeing the other suspiciously.

"No. Live in Brooklyn. I was there when they opened this bridge."

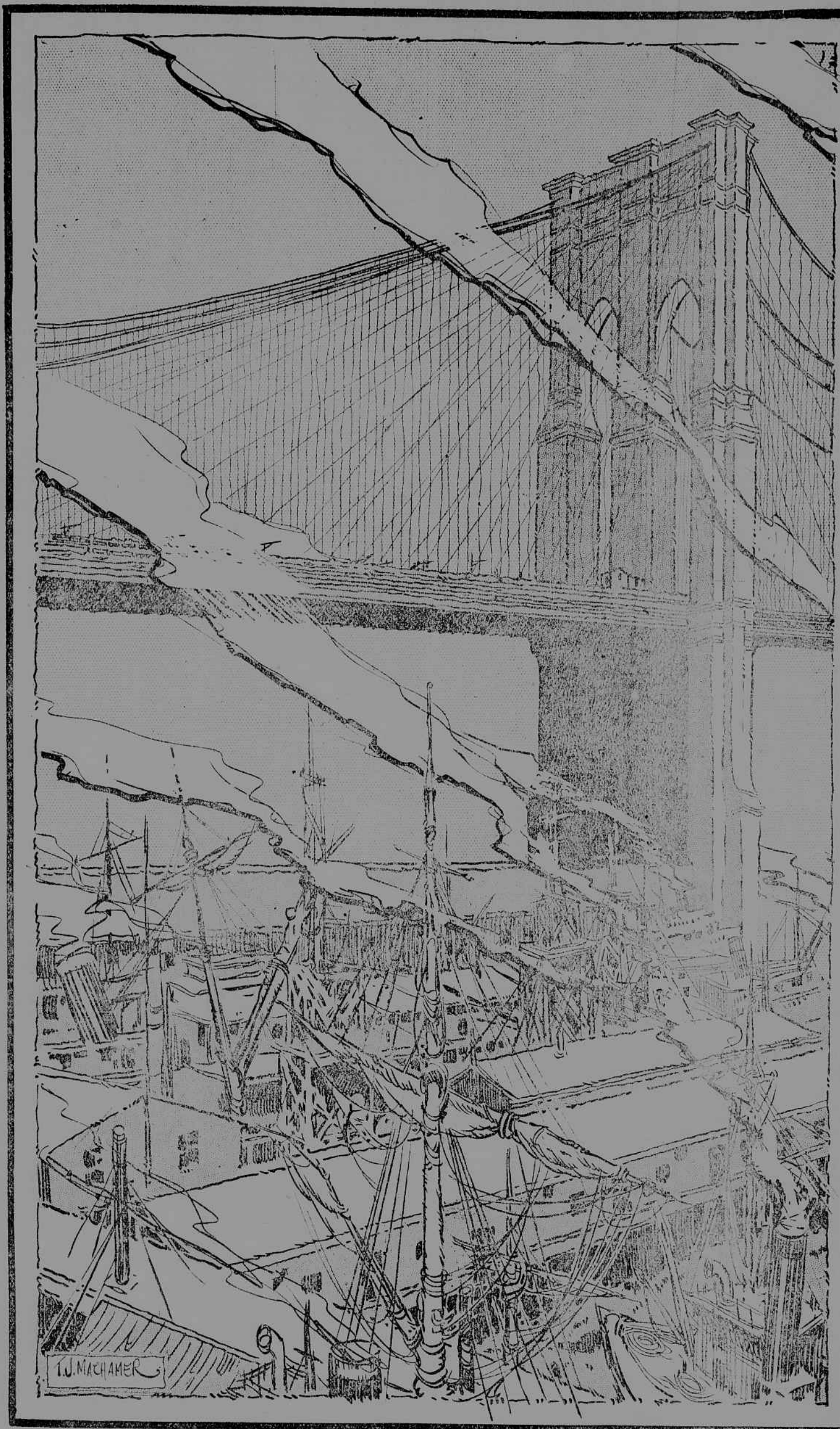
## "Yeh?"

"Yes. Abe Hewitt made the speech. Fine speech. The President of the United States was there and so was the Governor and the Mayor of New York—Brooklyn didn't belong to New York then, you know—and a lot of people."

"Must have been a great sight."

"Yes. You born in Brooklyn?"

"No." The workman showed a trace of uneasiness. "Kansas. But



Brooklyn Bridge From the Docks

sight is there than its towers of masonry rising above the surrounding vapors? And what more beautiful than Manhattan seen from the center of the span, when darkness steals on and the myriads of electric lights convert the huge downtown structures into frail edifices of incandescents and magic?

## Its Utilitarian Side

And yet, as a brief—it shall be very brief, for statistics, somehow don't belong in this picture—survey of the figures will show, the bridge also has a pretty fair utilitarian record.

In 1918 the B. R. T. furnished figures to the Public Service Commission showing that trolley cars had crossed the bridge 1,000,000

times that year and that in addition there had been 800,000 trips between Manhattan and Brooklyn by elevated trains.

As it is the practice to take the count of traffic on all the city bridges between October 15 and

November 15, when travel is considered normal, the figures for 1920 to the present time are not yet compiled, but there are others which will be found helpful.

Whereas, in 1912 only 3,913 vehicles used the two roadways of

the bridge daily, 6,605 passed over them each twenty-four hours, in 1919.

In 1912 trolley cars carried 119,893 persons a day, and in 1919, 356,356. Elevated traffic fell off a little last year as compared with 1912, but even so an average of 106,200 crossed by this route between morning and evening.

## The Nation's Population

These figures mean that by trolley car and elevated train alone 36,337,340 crossed the bridge in 1919.

If there be added to these the number of those who walk across or ride in the more than 6,600 motor cars and wagons that cross daily it is conceivable that a throng equal to

the entire population of the United States crosses Brooklyn Bridge every year.

There are no records of those who walk across daily—Manhattanward in the morning and Brooklynward in the evening, or perhaps on a quick round trip during the lunch hour—but that the total is large can be determined by any one who will take the trouble to watch the passersby during the busy hours.

Rarely, when the weather is pleasant, but some are to be seen loitering along the railings. To the south can be seen the ships passing out to sea, and to the north an edge of the New York navy yard and the other great spans girding the river. Sometimes an artist will be seen making sketches, and on warm summer evenings the benches are never quite free of the silhouetted forms of sweethearts watching the craft slipping along the waters.

## Thirteen Years in Building

For the benefit of those statistically inclined it may be added that the bridge took more than thirteen years to build, that it cost more than \$25,000,000, and that until more modern achievements came along it was generally looked upon—in Brooklyn, certainly, if nowhere else—as the eighth wonder of the world.

Looking back over the newspapers of the day when the bridge was opened to traffic one may get a vivid impression how the span was looked upon at that time, and also as to the source of that sentiment and affection which all but converted the structure into a national monument.

It must be remembered that when this marvel of engineering came into being there were only 50,000,000 persons in the United States, but 5,000,000 in the entire State of New York and only 2,000,000 in New York and Brooklyn combined.

Nothing so imposing and wonderful had been seen in the United States and at but few places in the world.

President Arthur himself journeyed from Washington to Brooklyn to attend the ceremonies, and it was an impressive spectacle indeed when he and Governor Cleveland, escorted by the 7th Regiment, walked across the structure.

Looking back over the newspapers, one may observe scores of advertisements inviting "ladies and strangers making the delightful trip across the East River" to seek rest and relaxation after the unprecedented experience in the refreshment parlors open on that occasion.

## Cities Made Holiday

New York and Brooklyn both declared a holiday; all the exchanges were closed, as were the courts and public offices; buildings were decorated with flags and bunting, and there were several imposing receptions, the most impressive being that at the home of Colonel Washington A. Roebling, the chief engineer, in Brooklyn, which was attended by the President.

Virtually the only public institution open for business on that great and glorious day was Castle Garden, which, of course, had to take care of the daily ingress of immigrants, never dreaming that as time went on it would be converted into an aquarium and a headquarters for strange fish.

In Brooklyn Mayor Seth Low introduced an innovation in the shape of rows of gas jets along the roof of his house on Columbia Heights, and Mayor Edson of New York was also doing everything possible to make the day a success. True, there were some in Manhattan who looked with disfavor upon the bridge, although scoffing at the suggestion that any number of persons would be induced thereby to move to Brooklyn, but these critics were in the minority. There was an effort to stir up a scandal over the fact that the celebration was so arranged as to take place on Queen Victoria's birthday, but the agitation died away when it was explained that the date selected was not the result of a pro-British plot.

## A National Event

From twenty-one to one hundred guns were fired; special trains brought visitors from many of the



big cities of the country; the speeches that were made filled pages in the newspapers; all over the United States note was taken of the importance of the event.

## The Tribune's Account

In the evening there was a special fireworks display, which was thus described by an observer on the roof of The New York Tribune Building:

"From the roof of The Tribune Building the pyrotechnic display was as a dream of fairyland. So clear had been the day that it was still light enough to see far across the city fifteen minutes before the announced time of beginning the exhibition. Gradually as light faded out of the west lamps on the bridge began to glow in brightness and a myriad of lights began their flickerings in all parts of the three cities spread out like a map below. A haze was beginning slowly to envelop the outlines of the bridge when a flock of rockets shot up, like a covey of partridges, from the center of the great span. Great lights, red and green—a ruby and an emerald—flashed out from the towers, and a thousand balls of fire, red, white, blue, purple and green, soared up simultaneously from both sides of the river. Fire balloons sailed lazily over the shipping, and ambitious bombs went carrying into the higher regions and, exploding there, dropped golden stars that filled the sky with glory."

For twenty years, until 1903 to be exact, when the Williamsburg Bridge was opened, Brooklyn Bridge remained the only span across the East River.

It would take a lot of print to give the history of the famous old link. A creation of romance, it took hold of the romantic like a fever. No theatrical production dealing with the dangers of a great city was complete which did not show, somewhere in the scenic distance a reproduction of the span. In the shadow of the stone approaches or underneath the wharving would be shown a pirates' retreat, where the beautiful heroine inevitably became a prisoner. Many persons sought to incorporate the glory of the bridge and their own by performing strange or dangerous deeds upon it.

## Steve Brodie's Leap

Steve Brodie gained fame and fortune by being the first to leap from the bridge into the river and survive, and he soon had several imitators, some of them successful and some not. As it was considered the last word in human daring to walk across Niagara Falls on a tight rope, so it was ultimate in courage to hurl one's self headlong from the lofty roadway into the waters beneath, and many attempted it.

These and other exploits helped spread the fame of the structure and what little hamlet in what remote corner of the country but held scores of small boys and youthful grown-ups who thrilled over the stories of these adventures.

Then along came the stories of the possible collapse of the bridge. As this was the greatest structure of its time, its destruction was looked upon as the greatest of possible tragedies, and enough to fill many volumes was written about the subject.

## Safer Than Ever

Recently the reports of the weakened condition of the bridge became so persistent that Professor W. H. Burr, for twenty-three years professor of civil engineering at Columbia University, was retained to make an inspection. His report was that the structure actually was safer than when it was built, although it was taking care of much more traffic than had been intended.

Brooklyn Bridge remained alone in its field until the Williamsburg span was built, and after that came the Manhattan Bridge, to be followed by the Queensborough and Hell Gate bridges. All are more modern than the first, none has won the same veneration, and no Brooklyn Bridge fan can be found who will admit that any of them is anywhere near as beautiful. Finally, in 1908, the first of the subway trains was placed in operation between the two boroughs.

Notwithstanding all these competitions, however, Brooklyn Bridge continues to hold its own, and from all indications will still be doing business at the old stand until long after the present generation has been gathered unto its fathers.

